



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: May 28, 2020

Agenda Item: Calf Creek WMA Habitat Restoration, Region 2

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background:

FWP proposes to treat conifer expansion in historically grass- and shrub-dominated habitats on the Calf Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA), which is managed primarily to provide elk and deer winter-range habitat. Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir have continuously expanded into formerly non-forested WMA lands and have shaded out grasses, shrubs, and forbs, thereby reducing forage availability and habitat diversity. Approximately 780 acres have been identified for treatment. FWP would use a combination of mechanical (e.g., logging and mastication) and non-mechanical (e.g., lop and scatter) treatments to remove conifers. Approximately 450 acres have commercially viable forest products, such as sawlogs, pulp, and firewood, that could be sold to help offset treatment costs.

FWP intends to seek partner involvement with local sportsmen's groups, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, WMA users, neighboring landowners, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Hamilton Unit, and the Bitterroot National Forest (BNF). FWP staff have been involved in the planning phase of the BNF's Gold Butterfly Project (GBP) and identified an opportunity early in the GBP planning phase to coordinate projects on the WMA and adjacent BNF lands. Coordinating treatments with the BNF and neighboring landowners could improve efficiency and result in larger scale habitat benefits.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

FWP has not yet sought public comment on this proposed habitat restoration project. Upon endorsement from the commission, FWP would engage with BNF staff to develop habitat treatment plans and goals and develop an environmental assessment (EA) for public comment.

Alternatives and Analysis:

Proposal alternatives and analysis would be developed by FWP (upon endorsement by the Fish and Wildlife Commission) and released in a draft EA for 30-day public review/comment opportunity.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

FWP recommends the commission endorse this proposal, allowing the department to pursue and evaluate it and to offer opportunities for public review and comment.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission endorse the proposed Calf Creek WMA habitat restoration project, allowing FWP to conduct further analysis and associated public review.